

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 11, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express grave concern over the Taliban's recent decision to restrict girls' access to secondary education. We urge you to use all diplomatic and economic leverage at your disposal to encourage the Taliban to allow girls of all ages to attend school.

Earlier this month, many Afghan girls were turned away from secondary school mere hours after they opened for the first time in seven months. The Taliban's decision to restrict high-school aged girls from receiving an education threatens to undo decades of hard-won education gains for the Afghan people and forces women to fall behind their male peers. In 2001, when the Taliban last held power, only 12 percent of primary-aged Afghan girls were in school.<sup>[1]</sup> By 2015, that figure had grown to nearly 50 percent, in part due to significant U.S. investments in educational infrastructure and opportunities for Afghan girls. In February 2021, an unprecedented 3.5 million Afghan girls were enrolled in school – almost 40 percent of the total enrolled population.<sup>[2]</sup>

Investing in Afghan girls' education is a vital U.S. national security interest with the potential to transform Afghanistan's future. In addition to improving girls' lifetime earnings and health outcomes, educational opportunities for girls are associated with stronger economies and lower child marriage and child stunting rates.<sup>[3]</sup> Girls' secondary education can be particularly transformative for communities, leading to increases in national growth rates and decreases in child and maternal mortality rates.<sup>[4]</sup> Girls' education is also central to peace and security and preventing terrorism and extremism from taking hold.<sup>[5]</sup> As Afghanistan finds itself at a critical crossroads, girls' education is imperative for stability, resiliency, and economic growth.

We are also concerned that the Taliban's restrictions on secondary education could have troubling implications for the rights of Afghan women and girls. Insufficient educational opportunities leave

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/girls-education-casualty-disastrous-withdrawal-afghanistan>

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://www.sigar.mil/interactive-reports/gender-equality/index.html>

<sup>[3]</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education>

<sup>[4]</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education>

<sup>[5]</sup> <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/closing-the-gap/>

women at a disadvantage in the labor market and are often associated with their exclusion from the workforce. While the Taliban previously made assurances that women and girls would continue to have the right to study and work, restrictions on secondary schools cast doubt on the Taliban's ability to fulfill its commitments, as well as its ability to negotiate in good faith. Furthermore, such educational restrictions contradict human rights agreements to which Afghanistan is obligated, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

The United States and our international partners must clearly signal that restricting girls' education damages Afghanistan's credibility on the international stage. As Afghanistan enters a new era, we encourage you to use all leverage at your disposal to defend girls' educational gains and prioritize women and girls' rights in your engagement in the region, including all diplomatic and economic negotiations with the Taliban. Specifically, we urge you to work with multilateral organizations and regional partners to establish consequences should the Taliban fail to reopen secondary schools for girls in a timely manner. This includes using your leverage with governments in the region to sanction Taliban leaders' international travel, restrict access to the Taliban leaders' financial assets, and publicly announce opposition to the Taliban's actions. We also encourage you to support alternative educational models that provide girls with the flexibility to continue learning regardless of Taliban policies, including online and app-based platforms, and consult with Afghan women-led civil society organizations leading efforts on the ground. Finally, bipartisan engagement on behalf of women and girls in Afghanistan has never been more important. Congress is working diligently to pass the Keeping Girls in School Act, H.R. 4134/S.2276, which is dedicated to closing the global gender gap and keeping girls in school when they are most at risk of dropping out.

Thank you for your consideration and your hard work to support the rights of Afghan women and girls. We look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Jackie Speier  
Co-Chair  
Democratic Women's Caucus



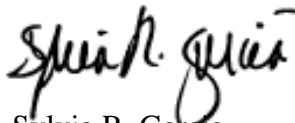
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Co-Chair  
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